

**TESTIMONY BY ANA ESTRADA, MERIDEN, CT., IN FAVOR OF SENATE BILL #363**

March 4, 2014

My name is Ana Estrada. I live at 55 Willow Street, also known as Community Towers, in Meriden. I am President of the Community Towers Resident Council, the resident association in my building. I am also a member of the Board of Directors of PHRN, the Connecticut Publicly-assisted Housing Resident Network. I am here today to testify in favor of Senate Bill #363.

We are in favor of Community Investment Account funds being transferred from the Connecticut Housing Finance Authority (CHFA) to the Department of Housing (DOH), as called for in Senate Bill 363. We believe that one department, under the direction of one Commissioner, should oversee the allocation of all housing monies, including Community Investment Account monies.

We are also in favor of \$150,000 of CIA funds being designated for resident empowerment work in public housing communities. I came to Meriden from New Jersey 7 years ago in order to be close to my daughter and her family. I came from a public housing community that was very organized – our resident association had regular meetings, elected representatives, and offered assistance to residents with taxes, translation, and other important activities. When I moved to Community Towers, the property did not have a tenant association. It was difficult to get information and ask questions about how the property operated. There seemed to be quite a few incidents of crime in the building. Within several months, we residents, especially the Spanish speaking residents, pushed to get help from PHRN in how to organize our buildings and how to build a strong independent tenant association. PHRN advised us about how to do outreach to residents in our buildings, to form a resident leadership team, to research and take on issues of concern; in short, how to get organized, stand up together and change things for the better at Community Towers. We believe that the \$150,000 of CIA funds that are designated for resident empowerment in Senate Bill 363 will be important for residents in other public housing communities who want assistance with the process of getting organized like we did in Community Towers.

Thank you for your time and attention.